Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants

Statement on

Piracy and seafarers: a human crisis

Recent reports in the media, about the plight of seafarers seized by pirates, has placed the tragic reality of piracy into the spotlight once more.

Already last February in the meeting of the Regional Coordinators of the Apostleship of the Sea – organized by this Pontifical Council – it was emphasized that piracy had reached its historical peak in 2010 with 445 attacks, 53 vessels seized and 1,181 seafarers captured. To date, this phenomenon doesn't show any signs of decreasing given that 214 new episodes have been reported, with 26 ships and 522 seafarers still held hostage by pirates (IMB Piracy Reporting Centre).

Even though the majority of attacks were recorded off the coast of Somalia, as a matter of fact, piracy remains a worldwide challenge that requires a global response, as the illusion of easy and immediate money has also attracted the interest of international criminal organizations.

The maritime world has responded by adopting several measures to protect vessels and their cargoes. Unfortunately, little attention is given to the seafarers and particularly to their families during and especially after the hijacking, leaving to the shipping company the responsibility to care for the people involved, according to the situations and their nationalities.

The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, which is responsible for the overall direction of the *Work of the Maritime Apostolate*, which *"promotes the specific pastoral care to the people of the sea"*, expresses its concern and issues a heartfelt appeal:

To the Governments and international organizations, to promptly activate the appropriate channels to safely bring homes the sequestered seafarers and to find solutions to this problem, given that it is necessary to intervene on the real causes of the phenomenon, such as unfairness in the distribution of goods between countries and the exploitation of natural resources.

To the ship owners, to adopt preventive measures to ensure the safety not only of the vessels and their cargoes, but also of the seafarers. In the tragic case of a hijacking, to assume an attitude of attention and support for the families of seized people and offer immediate assistance in order to reduce the long-term traumatic effects.

To all the hijacked seafarers, not to lose the hope that they will be soon reunited with their loved ones and to remain strong in their faith. To them the Apostleship of the Sea would like to express its complete solidarity.

To the families of the hijacked seafarers, not to hesitate to contact the *Stella Maris* Centers for assistance and support. In these tragic circumstances, these Centers more than ever can be a safe port and a beacon of hope. The seafarers should know that the chaplains and volunteers of the Apostleship of the Sea are at their side to face these long days and months of uncertainty and fear.

To the Christian communities, to pray Mary, *Star of the Sea*, to protect the seafarers from all possible dangers and to support those who, because of piracy, are going through a dark and difficult period of their life.

To the pirates, to cease their criminal activities and recognize the deep pain they are causing to seafarers (and their families) and to treat them with respect and humanity.

Finally, the Apostleship of the Sea expresses its willingness to cooperate and collaborate with Governments, international organizations, shipping companies and unions, to alleviate the sufferings of the hijacked seafarers and provide psychological and spiritual support to their families.

From the Vatican, 26th May 2011